The GODDESS

by CHARLES GODDARD and GOUVERNEUR MORRIS

Novelized from the Photo Play of the Same Name Produced by the Vitagraph Company

SYNOPSIS.

Professor Stilliter, psychologist, and Gordon Barclay, millionaire, plan to preach to the world the gospel of efficiency through a young and beautiful woman who shall believe that she is a heaven-sent messenger. They kidnap the orphaned little Amesbury girl, playmate of Tommy Steele, and conceal her in a cavern, in care of a woman, to be molded to their plan as she grows up. Fifteen years elapse. Tommy is adopted by Barclay, but loses his heirship and on a hunting trip discovers Celestia. Stilliter takes Celestia to New York. Tommy follows, she gets away from both of them, and her real work begins. At Barclay's invitation she meets a dozen of the business barons who are converted to her new gospel. She attends a ball and makes an impression on the society world. Tommy joins the labor ranks. Tommy plays Joseph to the wife of a modern Potiphar and is rescued from a lynching party by Celestia, who under Stilliter's influence, refuses to speak to him. She prevents a massacre of strikers.

ELEVENTH INSTALLMENT

CHAPTER XVIII.

That so many of the strikers had had the narrowest kind of an escape from being blown to pieces by dynamite did not make their feelings for Kehr and his men any friendlier, but one thing was certain, if harm came to the girl who had risked her life to warn them of their danger it would have to come to her over their dead bodies.

Wherever she went among the strikers she was welcomed with a kind of gallant adoration. Something about her seemed, when she entered a room, to pull the rudest and the most ignorant men to their feet. Everywhere she went she preached her gospel, softened hearts and made men and women hopeful of better things. And presently only those who were naturally bloodthirsty and who loved violence for its own sake talked openly of attacking the stockade. It seemed to Celestia that the strikers' demands were not unjust, and she determined to end the strike by persuading Kehr and the men he represented to meet their demands.

Elections were coming on, and the best way to secure the labor vote was to see that labor's envelope was better filled than ever before. With a new form of government in control of the nation's most disinterested and able men there would be such a saving of national waste that doubling the pay of every laborer in the country would be but a drop in the bucket.

Tommy could not see any possible good in Celestia's form of millennium.

He felt that, innocently, of course, and with the best intentions, she was trying to betray labor into the hands of capital, and he fought her doctrine tooth and nail. But what she seemed to offer was so glittering and alluring to the poor and needy that Tommy's opposing arguments found few listeners in Bitumen.

Celestia preached that government of the people by the people and for the people had been proved a gigantic failure, for two excellent reasons (1), it isn't by the people, and (2) it isn't for the people. The fathers who set down some very noble aspirations in black and white were instantly succeeded by politicians, who twisted their aspirations to their own ends. We are today a government of the people by the politicians and for the politicians. Patriotism, if it isn't dead, has gone to sleep. There are patriotic Virginians, patriotic Vermonters, too, but there are very few patriotic Americans.

No business run as this United States is run could possibly be a success. No employee of such a business could be blamed for failing in respect for his employers or in loyalty to them. So, do we want our country to be respectable and a success or don't we? Let it be run with the same American efficiency with which the Standard Oil company has been run, and nobody will be poor and no part of any city will be dirty and full of disease.

If there were no waste there would be plenty of money for everybody, or at least of the things money can buy. Celestia was insistent on this, and personally I am hanged if I don't think she was right. We waste everything—raw material, finished product, health and brains.

In the face of Kehr's stubbornness it was not easy to make progress toward a settlement of the strike, and at last Celestia telegraphed to Gordon Barclay and asked for definite power to speak for the coal companies and treat with the labor leaders.

His answer was a flying trip to Bitumen.

He was very sharp with Kehr, humbled him and browbeat him, caused Gunsdorf and the other leaders to be released, and then, after a long, secret conference with Professor Stilliter, he gave Celestia the power she asked for.

Before returning to New York he sent for Gunsdorf et al, made a personal peace with them, and obtained their political allegiance

"Celestia," he told them, "is right. The troubles between labor and capital are only the symptom of the great national wastage that has gone on since the beginning of things. We must give up electing men to high office as promises of efficiency, and elect only men with records of efficiency. We must be a nation, and no longer a collection of states pulling the government every which way for local interests We must see to it that the country is run like a trust bank or a great industry."

And he showed them how he believed that Celestia's system in question would wipe discontent from the face of the country.

"Celestia," he said, "has been empowered to settle this strike. In her judgment you are entitled to what you have asked for, and you will get it. But labor will find no permanent content under present conditions. I look to your individual and collective support for the new constitution. I believe that as a platform it will sweep the country in November, for its advantages to both labor and capital are so obvious that these two will be on the same side for once and henceforth, and when they are on the same side there is no resisting them."

CHAPTER XIX.

Only Tommy and Mrs. Gunsdorf held out against Celestia's influence. Tommy had never been affected by her hypnotic sway, and Mrs. Gunsdorf had devised a trick to thwart it. Having learned that there was something in Celestia's eye, some power which she could neither fathom nor resist, Mrs. Gunsdorf maintained her own independence in thought and action by the simple expedient of never meeting Celestia's eye.

Mrs. Gunsdorf was violently opposed to Celestia's theories. This opposition was not arrived at by elaborate mental process. The two women loved the same man. And the man very obviously loved Celestia (for when he wasn't with her he was trying his best to be with her). This was enough to place Mrs. Gunsdorf on any side of any question if only it was the opposite to Celestia's. Twice, when Celestia was addressing meetings of strikers (in interest of peace and progress), Mrs. Gunsdorf succeeded in creating such violent disturbance that she had to be removed forcibly from the room.

The strikers' favorite place for meeting was a large, shabby dance hall, in the meanest and most squalid section of Bitumen. Having been ejected from this hall, Mrs. Gunsdorf stood upon the outer steps, a picture of impotent and jealous rage.

A young woman, who, from her plain, neat costume rather suggested that she might be a lady's maid, and whose features were not distinctly visible owing to a thick veil, turned from perusing a bill poster which announced to the passerby the purpose of the meeting, at that moment in progress, to look at Mrs. Gunsdorf.

Mrs. Gunsdorf in turn eyed the stranger, and her rage gave place gradually to curiosity. Neatly and smartly dressed young women were very rare in Bitumen.

"Is the meeting over?" asked the stranger presently.

Mrs. Gunsdorf shook her head.

"Nor likely to be as long as there's a fool left to listen. When she gets

Mary Touched the Neck of Her Dress.

through speaking they yell for her until she has to speak again. Ever hear her?"

Mrs. Gunsdorf shrugged her vigorous shoulders with contempt.

"I never have," said the stranger. "I think I don't want to."

"Then what brings you to Bitumen? People are pouring in from all around to hear what she says. There don't seem to be any reason for coming to Bitumen."

"But she doesn't seem to have impressed you favorably?"

"Me! Hush! I didn't says she hasn't got good looks of a kind, but what a man can see in a namby pamby, goody goody like her gets me. Well, I'm going to move on. So long!"

The stranger hesitated, then simply followed and overtook Mrs. Gunsdorf.

"Do you mind if I walk with you? I—I was going your way."

"How do you know which way I was going?"

"I mean the way you are starting to do." The stranger laughed frankly. "And that's not the whole truth. I came to Bitumen to find out certain things. I'm a sort of reporter and new at the business. The boss told me there was a big story here and for me to go and get it. He only gave me a few hints to go on, and—"

"You want to ask me some questions? Is that it? Well, fire ahead."

"Of course," said the stranger, "anything to do with Mr. Gordon Barclay is a headline for the newspapers, especially now that he has taken up with the girl from heaven, and is advocating her policies. You must know all about everything that goes on. You see, it means such a lot to me, getting this story. Can't you help me out?"

"Are you a friend of Tommy Barclay?"

After hesitation, the stranger said: "Yes."

"So am I," said Mrs. Gunsdorf, "and that being so, I guess we've got a talk coming to us. Let's go in here."

A moment later Mrs. Gunsdorf and the stranger faced each other across a dirty table in a dirty windowed room that smelled of drink, and a bartender with an evil face had served them with a horrible mixture of whisky and water. Mrs Gunsdorf gulped down a large mouthful with apparent relish, but for the stranger one small sip seemed to be enough.

"We can talk straighter," said Mrs. Gunsdorf, "if you'll lift that veil."

The stranger hesitated, then obediently turned up the veil.

"I guess," said Mrs. Gunsdorf, after a moment of admiring scrutiny, "we'll unswallow the story about your being a reporter. You're a friend of Tommy Barclay and you belong in the same walks of life that he does."

Mary nodded.

"Well, I'm Mrs. Gunsdorf. I'm the woman that tried to put him in Dutch."

Miss Blackstone's eyes blazed with sudden interest.

"But you—you don't hate him any more?"

"Me. I hate him just the same as you do. Neither more nor less. But I'll tell who we do hate, if you don't know. We don't hate each other because he's passed us both up. We're in the same boat. We hate her."

"We have good cause to."

Mrs. Gunsdorf's shapely hand shot across the table, and Mary Blackstone clasped it for a moment in hers.

"I've told you my name," said Mrs. Gunsdorf.

"I am Mary Blackstone."

"Gee!" exclaimed Mrs. Gunsdorf, "but I thought she'd be dressed different. How do I know you're not stringing me again?"

"These are my maid's clothes," said Mary. "I didn't want to be recognized."

Mrs. Gunsdorf still looked a little doubtful. And Mary, smiling a little, touched the neck of her dress and disclosed a string of pearls, each pearl perfect and not much smaller than a cherry.

"I believe you," said Mrs. Gunsdorf. "But cover that thing up. You don't want anybody in Bitumen to know you've got that."

"If I lost it," said Mary, "and the right person found it, I wouldn't care."

She spoke in a cold, defiant sort of way, and then fastened her dress once more over the necklace.

"You think," said Mrs. Gunsdorf "that if it wasn't for her—you'd stand a chance?"

"Don't you feel a little that way, too, Mrs. Gunsdorf. You are wonderfully good looking, you know; and Mr. Barclay seems to have cast in his lot with labor. It looks as if you'd stand the better chance of us two, doesn't it?"

Mrs. Gunsdorf shrugged her shoulders.

"We couldn't stand any less chance that we do now. And the oftener he sees her, the less that chance gets."

"If she really comes from heaven—"

"The quicker she goes back the better?"

Mary laughed a cold little laugh.

"I'd not be the one to hold her back by the skirts."

"Nor I."

"But," said Mrs. Gunsdorf, "if she went to heaven, and anyone in this town had a hand in sending her, and got found out"—she shuddered—"that person would be torn to ribbons."

"Where does she live?"

"They've fixed tents for her and her party just outside the town. They call it 'Headquarters of Celestia—the Girl From Heaven.'"

"Who is her party?"

"There's Professor Stilliter—I guess she goes to him when she's in a fix for what to say next. There's a kind of half-witted fellow, named Douglas. She keeps a couple of secretaries going day and night. There's a cook and servants, lots of people. Wouldn't be easy to come at her."

"Have you any idea," asked Miss Blackstone, "how much these pearls I showed you are worth? No idea? A woman could live on the income. She could wear pretty clothes and have a servant. If she had a husband she didn't like, she could afford to divorce him. Do you know what I'd do if anyone should come to me and tell me that a certain person was never going to get in anybody's way again? I'd give those pearls to that person gladly, or I'd lose them where that person could find them."

"What's the use of wishes when your heart's sore?"

"No use at all," admitted Miss

Kehr Had Assented to the Settlement of the Strike.

Blackstone, "and still I'd rather be rich and heart-broken than poor and heart-broken, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Gunsdorf, thoughtfully, "I would."

Miss Blackstone rose, her hand at her throat where the pearls lay.

"I hope," she said, "that I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again—soon. What do you think?"

"Oh," said Mrs. Gunsdorf, "I shouldn't wonder.

And she, too, rose from the table, with a look in her eyes at once troubled and resolved.

CHAPTER XX.

And now the town of Bitumen became, as one paper put it, the center of a new world.

Kehr had assented grimly to the settlement of the stike on Celestia's terms. He had come out for Celestia's policies. And because of his very grimness and stubbornness his late enemies began to see that he would be a tower of strength to any cause which he should espouse. In that town, where a week ago his life would not have been worth a moment's purchase, he was already being talked of as the next United States senator from Pennsylvania.

Special correspondents had begun to flock into Bitumen. Many who came to jeer stayed in a state of great wonderment, and began presently to number themselves among the faithful.

Stop for a moment and try to realize the power for good or evil, the collective power, of the newspapers of America. If they are not the whole voice of the people, they are alone that part of it which can make itself heard. If we have any wisdom as a nation, we owe it to the newspapers. Likewise we owe it to them that we are not always wise or on the side of righteousness.

Celestia then began to develop strength in the newspapers. She was to develop so much before her course was run as is hardly believable. Already the idea of changing our government was no longer a news headline, but a definite and by no means uncomfortable thought in the minds of men. Some newspapers detested the thought because it was new; others welcomed and embraced it because it was new. Still others, and in the end these became her most powerful supporters, took some such attitude as this:

"You may argue for the new gospel; you may argue against it. You may call it treason; you may call it progress; but when all is said and done, certain facts will shine out clear as crystal.

"As a people we ought to be happy; we are not. Millions who ought to be clean and healthy are dirty and sick. There is enough money for everybody. A very small portion of this is in the hands of the efficient few; the rest is nowhere, being lost, wasted, thrown overboard.

"In those whom we elect to high office two qualities only seem necessary—inefficiency and selfishness.

"What are we going to do about it?"

CHAPTER XXI.

A certain scientific gentleman (of fiction), having constructed a very large monster, in the image of man, brought it to life—and it got away from him and raised all kinds of Cain.

Celestia was no Frankenstein; but Professor Stilliter no longer found in her the apt and docile pupil of earlier days. He found it harder and harder to control her. More and more she thought for herself. If Stilliter could have been entirely eliminated from her life, her life at least for a time must have gone on very much as it was going on. She believed firmly in what she preached. She believed that she came from heaven, and that she had come to make the world better, safer to live in, cleaner and happier.

Tommy argued with her so incessantly and often so intolerantly that if she hadn't been in love with the mere sound of his voice she couldn't have stood it.

Late one afternoon she came home to her little city of tents, very tired, and lay down in a hammock under a shady tree to rest. In spite of her celestial origin, Celestia was very human, and just as attractive to a sticky house fly as any other human being. Such a house fly made a dead set for her, and she found it impossible to rest. She went into the headquarters tent, which was the biggest and coolest, and the day's work being over and the secretaries gone, tried to rest there. And couldn't. She was tired and discouraged. She was tired because she had been doing too much, and she was discouraged because she was tired. Tommy had an uncanny faculty for dropping in upon her when she was in those moods. Possibly Freddie, the Ferret, had something to do with this faculty, for he worshipped Tommy. Be that as it may, Freddie was about the tents when Celestia came in, tired. He vanished presently, and a little later Tommy appeared, looking very brown and manly and refreshing.

Celestia heard his voice and called out to him, a little petulantly perhaps. Tommy poked his head in through the door of the big tent and greeted her loudly and joyously. The moment she saw him she felt a little rested.

Meanwhile Professor Stilliter, in his tent, reading a deep and thick book on "The Psychology of Government," heard the two voices—and couldn't read another word.

"Celestia," said Tommy, "you look so little and helpless and unprotected, curled among those curtains, that I'm tempted to pick you up, put you in my pocket and take you somewhere where you can't get into any more mischief."

"I dare you to try!" exclaimed Celestia.

Then they both laughed and Tommy advanced into the tent.

So much articulate speech Professor Stilliter overheard, but no more. After that there came to him only the murmurs of one voice or the other, sounds which to a jealous man were more provocative of impotent rage than actual words would have been.

He stared at the book in which he was no longer able to read a word and "ate his heart out," as the saying is.

"One of these days," he thought, "she'll say 'yes' to that meddling fool and leave all my fine schemes high and dry. If I really thought that, and sometimes I really do think it, I'd—I'd—"

Now the professor took off his eyeglasses and thought very hard indeed and looked very horrid and blind and evil. Every now and then he murmured to himself: "My God, why not?"

"So you dare me to try, do you?" said Tommy.

Her eyes sparkled now; she was feeling very much rested.

"Yes, I do."

Quick as any cat the young man leaned over and picked her up from the midst of the curtains as easily as if she had been a kitten, and so held her almost at the level of his chin. And now Celestia felt completely rested. It was as if she had received refreshing strength from Tommy's strong arms.

"Oh," he said, "if a deluded nation could behold you now!"

"Put me down," she exclaimed, "somebody might see us."

"Of course they might," comforted Tommy. "The tent flaps are wide open. But I don't care if I never put you down."

"Tommy!" she exclaimed.

"I should worry!" said Tommy, but when she began to struggle he put her down.

"And what did you mean," she asked, her great eyes flashing, but not with anger, and her cheeks flaming, "by a deluded nation."

"You don't look as if you could," said he, "but you've deluded several million people out of a hundred million, and it looks as if you were going to delude the rest. But you'll be sorry enough for yourself when they find out they've been deluded! Celestia, I've the most love for you that anybody in the world has for anybody. Isn't that enough? You love me, don't you?"

"Yes, I do."

"You ought to trust the man you love. You ought to trust his judgment."

"I do about love. But—"

"Oh, I know the rest that is coming. You think you see clear, but you don't. You're blind as a bat. But some day you'll see—you'll see when your own chance of happiness is gone forever and your theories have brought more evil on mankind than it endures now."

"Tommy," said Celestia with a shudder and great seriousness, "how can you love me and think me evil?"

"You evil! You precious lamb!"

She waved aside the arms that had gone impulsively out to her.

"If in your judgment I am going to bring more misery into the world then I am evil in your judgment. How can you reconcile that with loving me?"

"Celestia," said Tommy, "if you select such a man as my father (much as I love him) president, give the power of making the laws to such men as Kehr, whom you are talking of for senator—why, he's placarded all over town—why, you'll have an efficient government, I don't deny that, but mark me, it will be an efficiency that will begin at home! Those who are rich now will be richer, and there will be more of them; those who are poor now will be poorer and more wretched."

"You assert and assert and assert, but you don't reason."

"I don't reason! Well, I like that."

"Give me just reason then for thinking that too much efficiency is a dangerous thing."

"That's a challenge," said Tommy. "I accept it, and here's one good reason. The first thing a government that was too efficient would do would be to muzzle the press, so that nobody could complain of its efficiency. When you muzzle the press you extinguish liberty. And I tell you that a man rather would be poor, filthy and free than a rich slave. There's only one real difference between an aristocracy and a republic. The newspapers of a republic print the news and the newspapers of an aristocracy don't."

"According to you I'm not fit to live."

"Oh, Celestia."

"If you even own that I was going to ruin the world and that my death would leave the world as it is, would you wish me dead?"

"What an awful thought, Celestia!"

"Would you?"

"I would wish you somewhere where you could do no harm. I would keep you always in my arms and never let you go."

"Tommy, dear, you're so tiresome sometimes."

It was almost dark when Tommy tore himself away and went back to the town. Celestia would have liked to have sat on and on in the darkness, thinking long thoughts. But her reverie was interrupted by a voice, which its owner, without great effect, was evidently striving to make agreeable.

"Are you ready to talk a little business now? May I come in?"

"Yes, come in."

There was a reluctance and petulance in Celestia's voice which did not help to assuage the jealous frenzy which possessed Professor Stilliter.

"Celestia," he said, "look at me and listen to me."

She looked and listened.

"This folly of yours, this weakness, is going to imperil the cause—"

The words meant nothing to her. He was trembling with a passion growing more and more careless of

She Looked and Listened.

consequences, he was exerting all the powers of his will to subdue hers.

Presently her eyes faltered and half closed; her head dropped. An equally extraordinary change came into Stilliter's voice. It became at once greasily soft, caressing and triumphant.

"Come to me. Come close."

It was now very dark in the tent.

"Kiss me! Kiss me!"

At that moment from far off there sounded the whistle of a departing train. On one of the platforms stood a young woman, thickly veiled, who might have been mistaken for a lady's maid. She was waving one hand to a friend, who waved back, with the other she appeared to be somewhat significantly tapping the neck of her dress.

The friend on the platform looked surprisingly like Mrs. Gunsdorf.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)